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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000073

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [MU](#)  
SUBJECT: C-NE6-02218: OMAN-ISRAEL RELATIONS

REF: A. 06 STATE 203034  
[1](#)B. 06 MUSCAT 01735

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Oman maintains contacts with the Israeli government and has quietly welcomed official Israeli visitors. Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yousef bin Alawi has spoken to Israeli Foreign Minister Livni on several occasions, and met with an Israeli delegation in Muscat in December. While the Omani government is likely to continue its dialogue with Israel, it is not seeking to expand Oman-Israeli relations and tries to keep its interaction with Israelis out of the public eye. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Although the Omani government closed the Israeli Trade Mission in Muscat in 2000 during the Second Intifada, it has since maintained good communications with Israeli officials, including at senior levels. Minister bin Alawi, for example, briefly met with Israeli Foreign Minister Livni on the sidelines of the 2006 UN General Assembly in New York, and received a visiting Israeli delegation in December 2006 led by the Director General of Israel's Foreign Ministry (ref B). According to contacts, bin Alawi and Livni continue to talk semi-regularly on the phone. MFA Under Secretary Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi speaks with Israeli officials on a more regular basis, usually by telephone, and serves as Oman's de facto "desk officer" for Israeli issues.

[1](#)3. (C) Sayyid Badr told Ambassador on January 17 that Oman was "quite comfortable" with its current level of contact with Israel. (Note: The Under Secretary also heads Oman's role in the Muscat-based Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDRC), of which Israel is an active member. End Note.) He stated that there was no specific schedule for discussions with Israeli officials, but that talks -- which covered a broad range of issues -- took place "when circumstances allow us to meet, whether in Muscat or elsewhere." Sayyid Badr commented that Oman's dialogue with Israel provided "a useful exchange of views," and opined that both he and bin Alawi found Livni to be more "open-minded" than her predecessors. He further shared that Israeli visitors often inquired about the views of other Arab countries on regional issues. For example, Sayyid Badr related that an unnamed Israeli official who came to Muscat in the summer of 2006 expressed great satisfaction with initial Saudi statements criticizing Hizballah for the Israel-Lebanon confrontation and asked how Israel might "initiate something" with Saudi Arabia in light of their shared disdain for the militant Shi'a organization.

[1](#)4. (C) Sayyid Badr said most Omani contacts with Israel are conducted through MFA channels in both countries, although meetings may include participants from outside their

respective foreign ministries. There are no direct military-to-military relations between Oman and Israel, he noted. While discussions often focused on security and political topics, Sayyid Badr remarked that a small delegation of Israelis was due to shortly arrive in Muscat for talks on business issues with the Oman Center for Investment Promotion and Export Development (OCIPED). He added that Oman wished to keep such meetings out of the press, including foreign media outlets, and accordingly asked Israeli visitors to maintain a low profile.

15. (C) In a January 23 meeting, the Under Secretary's Deputy Office Director, Humaid al-Maani, told poloff that while the MFA continues to be interested in meeting with official Israelis, it had nevertheless rebuffed "several" Israeli requests for visits. Decisions whether to accept Israeli visitors, he explained, depended on the level of the persons involved "and the regional circumstances and events at the time." Maani stated that the Israeli delegation meeting with OCIPED earlier in the week had talked of promoting direct Oman-Israel trade, and had even broached the idea of reopening the Israeli trade office in some manner, although Maani was quick to point out that such a proposal was "not going anywhere." (Note: While talking to reporters in October 2006, bin Alawi side-stepped a question on his UNGA meeting with Livni and said that reopening an Israeli office in Muscat "is definitely not on the table." End Note.) Maani added that the MFA received "very angry phone calls" from within the Omani government whenever word leaked out that official Israeli visitors were in Muscat.

16. (S/NF) Comment: Barring major changes in Israeli stances on the peace process and regional issues, Oman will likely continue its current level and pattern of dialogue with

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Israel, but will not seek to expand ties or increase the frequency of contacts. There are no direct communications between the Omani and Israeli intelligence services. Bin Alawi and other senior Omani officials recognize the utility of keeping lines of communication open with Israel, but actively seek to keep contacts under the radar screen to avoid stirring up anti-Israel sentiment among Omanis. End Comment.  
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